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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 000629

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [PREL](#) [CG](#)

SUBJECT: NORTH KIVU: STRUGGLING TO SURVIVE IN RUTSHURU  
TERRITORY

Classified By: PolCouns MSanderson, reasons 1.4 b/d.

11. (C) Summary: During an April 12-13 trip through remote areas in North Kivu, Emboff witnessed firsthand the difficult reality of integrated FARDC troops in their pursuit of FDLR elements. While this particular FARDC brigade seemed well-supplied and in good spirits, the obstacles faced by the Congolese soldiers are overwhelming. But it is the Congolese villagers -- whether serving as victims, provisioners, or unwilling hosts to both sides -- who are bearing the greatest burden in the perpetual struggle. End summary.

12. (C) PolCouns joined North Kivu Governor Eugene Serufuli, protected by twenty police and about one hundred FARDC soldiers from the Second Integrated Brigade (newly deployed to Rutshuru), on a trip from Goma via the border with Uganda, through Virunga Park and then back to Rutshuru. The route passed through many villages repeatedly victimized by FDLR attacks, including Ishasha where eight people were burned alive in their houses several weeks ago. (Note: The most active FDLR elements in the province are in the band running roughly from Rutshuru to Rwindi through Virunga Park. End Note.) About 50-60 bandits -- deserters from the disintegrated Fifth Integrated Brigade, formerly stationed in Rutshuru, which collapsed after running away under fire during an attack -- are reportedly also preying on homes on the outskirts of Rutshuru and on small villages nearby while attempting to stay out of FDLR-occupied zones.

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Getting the Lay of the Land  
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13. (C) The geography of the route was a testimony to the challenges of dealing with the FDLR. Villages of varying sizes bunch next to the road for the sense of protection it provides. The newest of the tiny houses are constructed without windows because, as many villagers insisted, "they are safer from attack." (Comment: Any semblance of security is illusory in the flammable pole-and-thatch-roofed huts; the lack of windows seems only to render the occupants even less aware of the approach of attackers, and therefore less likely to flee. End Comment.) Heavy jungle normally began a mere 100-200 yards from the edge of the villages. Walking into one jungle patch behind the village of Kiyaya, the visitors stumbled (quite literally) into what had been an FDLR campsite. The edges of the village were visible, and it was clear that observers could lie in the bush during the day, watching village activity and identifying any individual or item of interest, and then return at night to prey. It was equally clear that -- at least in some cases -- FDLR members probably are billeting themselves on village members. The

evasive replies of various villagers to direct questions seemed to substantiate that belief.

¶4. (C) In a telling example of FDLR surveillance, during the short time it took the convoy to drive to Virunga Park and back, FDLR elements entered the outskirts of Ishasha and burned two houses, advising the distressed villagers watching that "this is a message." Several troops from the Second Integrated reportedly had chased the FDLR to the edge of the forest, but stopped there.

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Huts Melting in the Rain  
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¶5. (C) The trip offered glimpses of the operations of the Second Integrated Brigade, sent to Rutshuru to replace the now-defunct Fifth Integrated Brigade. The Second is equipped (at least for now) with at least two large troop-transport trucks with tarpaulin tops, each capable of carrying up to 100 troops. The trucks are top-heavy, however, and especially on the deplorable road -- pitted with deep potholes and strewn with large rocks -- tend to overturn fairly frequently. (Note: A truck flipped twice in the two-day trip, but was successfully righted each time with little damage to men or machine. End Note.) The troops were equipped with rain ponchos, helmets and even functional radios, one radio per each eight-man group.

¶6. (C) The Second also has ten operational jeeps, which are used to transport and deposit eight-man patrols at designated sites along the road in attempts to engage the FDLR. The patrols essentially walk a wide circle ranging outward from their jeep and back to it -- along the road, through the

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villages, into the jungle, then back to the road. One of the larger trucks with 50-100 backup troops monitors the road, responding to calls from the patrols when they come under attack. No large-scale confrontations have taken place yet, although one patrol has been attacked twice and the commander is implementing additional patrols in that zone.

¶7. (C) Despite the relatively good equipment, field conditions for the Second are poor. One of the field camps visited consisted of seventeen squat grass huts in a clearing. As the rain poured down during the brief visit, the little grass huts completely dissolved into puddles on the ground, in one case leaving a field pack sitting forlornly in the mud. Food is mostly obtained (PolCouns was told "donated") from the villages the FARDC is protecting. Village women wash the uniforms (one woman insisted that it is a "privilege" to do so). When troops fall ill, as the commander said frequently happens, they are carried out to the road to await transport from the large truck, which returns to Rutshuru three times a day to refuel, and they are deposited at the Brigade headquarters for treatment. At the moment the Brigade infirmary has only aspirin tablets to treat any sickness or injury. The Second is a fusion (as are most of the integrated brigades) of ex-ANC Tutsi troops (about 30 percent), ex-FAC (so-called government troops, about 40 percent) and ex-MLC (about 30 percent), although the commander stated that there are also five "baby Tigers" (the sons of former Katangan Tigers who have begun returning to the DRC from Angola and are being quietly integrated into the military) and three Mai Mai.

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Comment  
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¶8. (C) For the moment at least, morale seems good among the members of the Second, one of whom reported that his current circumstances are much improved from his pre-integrated situation. This is largely a result of having equipment and food, although being paid would also be nice, as the same

soldier noted. The commander stated that his biggest challenge is keeping his troops motivated and disciplined, followed by ensuring that there are sufficient supplies of gasoline to continue the patrols against the FDLR. He said that his troops were sufficiently trained and they would engage effectively against the FDLR when given the chance. As it seems likely that sooner or later a confrontation will indeed occur, the Second's readiness could soon be tested. End comment.  
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